



THE LIBERTY "BOYS OF '76"

A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution.

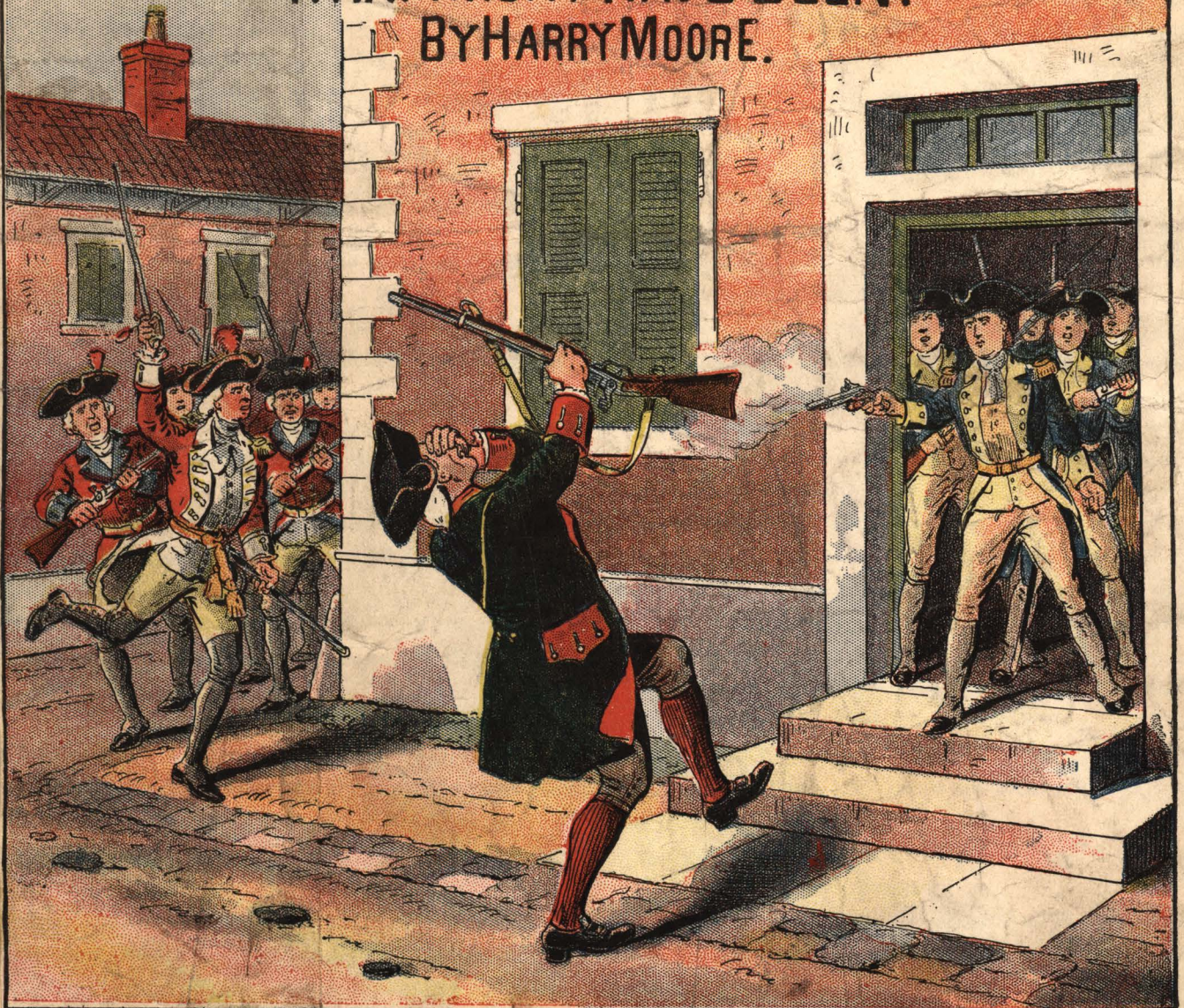
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No. 20.

NEW YORK, MAY 17, 1901.

Price 5 Cents.

THE LIBERTY BOYS' MISTAKE; OR "WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN." BY HARRY MOORE.



The Tory uttered a cry of pain and fell to the ground. Then from around the corner of the building rushed a score of redcoats.

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CHAPTER I.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

"Where are we, anyway, Dick?"

"That question is somewhat of a puzzler, Bob."

"Looks to me as if we were next door neighbors to being lost."

"Not so bad as that, Bob."

"Well, if we are not lost, where are we?"

"In the State of Delaware, Bob."

"H'm—yes—I am aware of that fact myself, Dick," said Bob, dryly; "Delaware isn't a very big State, but it is big enough to get lost in."

"True; but we are not lost yet."

"Speak for yourself, Dick. As for myself, I believe I can truthfully say that for once in my life I am really lost."

"No one is ever lost who knows north from south and east from west, Bob."

"Figuring that way, I am not yet lost, as I still know the directions; but I haven't much idea regarding where we are; have you?"

"Well, as I figure it, Bob, we are in the northern part of Delaware, and about halfway between the Delaware River and Chesapeake Bay."

It was a lovely day in the last week of August, 1777.

In a little glade in the deep woods of Northern Delaware two youths had come to a stop.

The youths were handsome fellows of about eighteen years of age and were mounted on a couple of magnificent-looking horses.

These youths were Dick Slater and Bob Estabrook, two of the most noted scouts and spies in the patriot army.

They were also members of a company of youths known as the "Liberty Boys of '76."

Dick Slater had organized the company and was its captain.

Bob was his nearest and dearest boy friend, and often accompanied Dick when he was sent on scouting and spying expeditions.

They were on a scouting expedition now.

About the middle of July, General Howe, the British commander-in-chief, had put his army aboard the British fleet then at anchor in New York Bay, and a little later on the fleet had sailed southward.

It was Howe's intention to sail up the Delaware River, land his troops near Philadelphia, and capture the "rebel capital" as it was called.

Dick, while playing the spy among the British, had learned this, and had taken the news to General Washington at Morristown.

Washington had then moved the main portion of his army southward, and, crossing the Delaware, took up a position at Germantown, near Philadelphia.

He had sent Dick and Bob to the south end of New Jersey to keep watch for the coming of the British fleet, with instructions to come and inform him of its approach as soon as they sighted it.

The fleet had come in sight in Delaware Bay, but for some inexplicable reason, had suddenly turned about and sailed away again, headed toward the south.

Dick and Bob supposed this to be merely a feint, and thought that the fleet would return and sail up the Delaware.

It did not return, however, and after watching two days the youths returned to General Washington with the news.

The commander-in-chief was puzzled.

He could not think what this queer move on the part of the British fleet signified.

He believed it to be merely a feint, so he sent Dick and Bob back with instructions to keep watch five days longer.

This they did, but the fleet did not put in an appearance.

When they returned to Washington with this information he was still unsatisfied.

He believed the British fleet would yet return, and so he sent Dick and Bob back once more with instructions to watch another five days.

This they did.

Still no British fleet appeared.

When they returned to the commander-in-chief with the information he was greatly puzzled, as were also the members of the staff.

They talked the matter over from every point of view.

They could not make up their minds with regard to what the British intended to do.

They decided that it was General Howe's intention to do one of three things.

He had sailed southward to attack Charleston, had sailed northward with the intention of going up the Hudson and co-operating with Burgoyne, or he would yet return to the Delaware and try to capture Philadelphia.

But which of these three things was contemplated?

That was the question.

Being in doubt, General Washington decided to remain where he was for the present.

If the British returned and attempted to move on Philadelphia, he would be at hand ready to meet them.

If they had gone south to attack Charleston, he could do nothing, anyway, as Charleston was seven hundred miles distant, and he could not reach there in time, so he might as well remain where he was.

He had sent scouts across to the east coast of New Jersey, and also to the mouth of the Hudson, to keep watch for the return of the British fleet, and held himself in readiness to move immediately should his scouts report that the fleet was sailing back toward New York.

Dick and Bob had been sent southward to keep watch for the approach of the fleet up the Delaware.

Instead of crossing the Delaware River and going down to the south end of New Jersey, as they had done on the former occasions, the youths rode in a southwesterly direction down into the northern part of Delaware.

They took up their position on the west bank of the Delaware, at a point about twelve miles south of Wilmington.

At this point a hunter-trapper, named Sam Harding, had built a cabin, and as he was a strong patriot, he welcomed Dick and Bob and let them stay at his cabin.

On this day of which we write, Mr. Harding, having some work on hand that would keep him at home all day, Dick and Bob decided to go on a scouting and hunting expedition; so, leaving Mr. Harding to keep watch for the British fleet, they had mounted their horses and set out.

In case the fleet showed up, Mr. Harding was to fire a shot to notify them.

The youths had gone farther than they thought for, and when we introduced them to the reader they had, as Dick surmised, reached a point about midway between the Delaware River and one of the extreme north arms of the Chesapeake Bay.

"Phew! it's hot here, Dick," said Bob, presently; "that sun is almost enough to melt a fellow."

"So it is," admitted Dick; "it is more pleasant in among the trees where the sun cannot strike us."

"Come on, Dick; let's get where it is shady."

The youths rode forward and entered the timber.

"Which way, Dick? Shall we start back now?" asked Bob.

"Not right away, Bob. Did you notice that wooded ridge ahead of us?"

"Yes; what of it?"

"Let's go up there and take a look around. We ought to be able to get a good view up there."

"What is there to see, Dick?"

"Oh, I don't know that there is anything in particular. I judge, however, that we shall be able to see the Delaware from there, and we will be enabled to get our bearings and go straight back to Mr. Harding's."

"All right, Dick; you're the leader of this expedition."

The youths rode onward.

The timber was quite heavy with considerable underbrush, and their progress was slow.

It took them quite awhile to reach the top of the ridge.

But they reached it at last.

The trees were so thick here that their view was obstructed and they could not get a good view from the ground.

They would have to climb a tree.

They dismounted and tied their horses.

Then selecting a tall, straight tree, Dick and Bob proceeded to climb it.

This was not a very difficult task for them.

They had all their lives lived in a timbered country and were used to climbing.

Within an incredibly short space of time they were at the top of the tree.

The youths uttered exclamations of pleasure.

They were enabled to get a splendid view from where they were.

Away in the distance they could see the Delaware River, and it did not take them long to pick out the point where Mr. Harding's cabin was located.

Then Bob turned his eyes and looked westward toward Chesapeake Bay.

As he did so a wondering cry of amazement escaped him.

"Look, Dick!" he cried; "see! yonder are a lot of ships!"

Dick turned his head and looked.

About five miles to the westward the blue waters of one of the arms of the Chesapeake Bay could be plainly seen.

And, as Bob said, the white sails of a number of vessels could be seen.

Fifteen or twenty were already in sight, and, one after another other ships kept coming in sight, while at the

horizon away in the distance could be seen the masts and top sails of still other ships.

A cry of wondering amazement escaped Dick.

"Bob!" he exclaimed, in a tense, excited tone, "as sure as you live it is the British fleet!"

CHAPTER II.

THE BRITISH FLEET.

"Great guns, Dick, do you really think so?" exclaimed Bob.

"I do, Bob; I am sure of it."

Bob shook his head.

"I can hardly believe it, Dick," he said. "It must be a fleet of fishing vessels."

"No, no, Bob; fishing vessels would not look as large as those vessels do, at such a distance. They are British warships. It is Admiral Howe's fleet—the same that we saw three weeks ago in Delaware Bay."

"But why in the name of common sense did it sail away around a distance of four hundred miles to reach a point not more than a dozen miles from one he could have reached by going fifty miles up the Delaware from where the fleet was when we saw it in Delaware Bay?"

Dick shook his head.

He was puzzled.

"I give it up, Bob. That is certainly a mystery."

The youths remained in the treetop for perhaps half an hour.

They watched the British vessels with eager interest.

Gradually more and more of the British ships came into view, until at last the youths had counted up to more than two hundred.

The entire fleet was now in sight.

There was no longer the shadow of a doubt but that it was the British fleet.

This being settled to a certainty, Dick made up his mind that it was time to act.

"Well, let's get down, Bob," he said.

"Then what, Dick?"

"The news of the appearance of the British fleet must be taken to Washington, Bob."

The youths took one more look at the British fleet and then made their way down out of the tree.

While climbing down out of the tree Dick had been thinking.

When they reached the ground Dick turned to his companion.

"Bob," he said, "I guess I will let you take the news to the commander-in-chief, and I will stay here and keep watch of the enemy."

"All right, if you say so."

"You can find your way all right, Bob?"

"By returning to Mr. Harding's cabin and starting from there I can."

"All right; let's set out at once, then."

The youths mounted their horses.

They made their way through the timber as rapidly as possible.

This was not very rapid, however.

They could not go faster than a walk.

An hour and a half later, however, they reached Mr. Harding's cabin.

When they told him what they had discovered, he was almost as excited as the youths had been.

"Thet beats anything I ever heerd tell uv!" he exclaimed. "Them redcoats must be crazy. Whoever'd a thort uv seein' ther British fleet show up in Chezzypeake Bay!"

"It's a strange piece of business," agreed Dick; "so strange in fact that I am going to let Bob take the news to General Washington, while I go over and see if I can find out what their action means."

"An' I'll go with you, by jucks!"

"I wish I could," said Bob, with a regretful air. "However, I have other work to do."

"So you have, Bob; and the quicker you get started the better. General Washington will want to know the news at the earliest possible moment."

"So he will, Dick; I will be off at once."

He bade Dick and Mr. Harding good-by, and, mounting his horse, rode away toward the north.

Dick and Mr. Harding did not delay long after Mr. Harding had gone.

They set out, Dick on horseback and Mr. Harding on foot.

As the way would be almost wholly through timber, Dick's horse could go no faster than a walk, and Mr. Harding could easily keep up.

After a journey of about three hours, the two came to a stop on a little eminence overlooking Chesapeake Bay.

The bay was not more than half a mile distant.

The two could see the ships very plainly and could likewise see what was going on.

The ships were all at anchor, and many boats could be seen coming and going between the ships and the shore.

The boats coming shoreward were filled with redcoats, while those returning were empty, save for the men at the oars.

"The army is being landed," said Dick.

"I guess you're right, my boy," replied Mr. Harding.

"Well, I expected as much. It is no doubt the intention of General Howe to march from here to Philadelphia."

"I guess yer right; but et's er mighty funny thing ter me; ye told me thet ye seen ther fleet over in Delaware Bay three weeks ago. Now, et c'u'd hev went up ther Delaware past Wilmington—or even up ter Chester, Pennsylvany, an' ther soldiers c'u'd hev been landed there within fifteen miles uv Philadelphy. Instid uv doin' thet, et sailed way aroun' four hun'ed miles, lost three weeks' time, an' ther men air landin' now at er p'int fifty er sixty miles frum Philadelphy. I don't unnerstan' et!"

"Neither do I," said Dick.

It was now getting pretty well along toward evening.

Dick and Mr. Harding remained at their post and watched the British until it became dark.

"What are we going to do for something to eat?" asked Dick.

"I've got er frien' living over heer at ther village," was the reply; "we can go thar an' git sumthin' ter eat."

"What village is it?"

"Elkton."

"How far is it from here?"

"'Bout er mile."

"Well, let's go there at once, then. We will get something to eat, and then I will make up my mind what to do. I wish to learn, if possible, exactly what the plans of the British are."

The two started and made their way through the timber.

Mr. Harding took the lead as he knew the way, while Dick did not.

Twenty minutes later they emerged from the timber into the open country.

"Ther village is right ahead uv us, an' we'll be thar in er minnet."

Shortly afterward Mr. Harding came to a stop in front of a house standing at the outskirts of the village.

"My frien' lives heer," he said. "Bring yer horse roun' ter ther stable. We'll fix 'im up all right, an' then go ter ther house."

They led the horse around and put him in the stable, and

Mr. Harding, who seemed to know where everything was, gave the horse some feed.

This done, Mr. Harding made his way back to the front door of the house, and, opening it, entered, followed by Dick.

Mr. Harding's friend was a good-hearted patriot by the name of Joe Thompson.

He was glad to see Mr. Harding and greeted Dick warmly when told who the youth was.

Even away down here they had heard of Dick Slater and his wonderful exploits as a spy among the British.

"Can you give us something to eat, Joe?" asked Mr. Harding. "We are nearly starved."

"I guess we kin," was the reply; "wife's out in the kitchen getting supper now. I'll go let her know ye are heer, so she can cook enuff for all uv us."

He hastened into the kitchen, but was soon back again.

"Supper'll be ready in ha'f an hour," he said.

Then they sat down to talk.

"I s'pose ye know ther British air landin', Joe," remarked Harding.

"Yaas," was the reply; "an' officer an' some soldiers were in the village this arternoon."

"Sho, ye don't say! Whut did they want heer so soon?"

"They brung er procklermashun uv amnesty frum General Howe."

"Oho! I see. He wanted ter git recroots, did he?"

"Yaas; but he didn't git very many, at enny rate he didn't this arternoon. He may git more ter-morrow."

"I hope not," said Dick.

"An' so do I."

"Me, too."

Just then Mrs. Thompson announced supper, and the three went into the other room and sat down at the table.

Mrs. Thompson greeted Mr. Harding and Dick pleasantly.

She was a woman who had but little to say, but she listened to the talk of the three with interest.

They had just finished their supper and returned to the other room when there came a loud knock on the door.

Dick and the men looked at one another in surprise.

"Who kin thet be," remarked Mr. Thompson, in a low tone.

"I dunno," said Harding.

Just then the knock was repeated, this time louder than before.

"Open in the name of the king!" cried a hoarse voice.

"Blazes!" exclaimed Harding, in a low, excited tone.

"Et's ther redcoats!"

CHAPTER III.

SURROUNDED BY REDCOATS.

The three looked at one another in dismay.

"What did it mean?"

"Why did the British come to Mr. Thompson's house?"

This was the question the three asked themselves.

They could not answer it, of course, but it was soon to be answered for them.

Again came a knock, louder than either of the preceding ones.

"Open the door, or we will burst it down!" cried a hoarse, angry voice.

"Yer'd better open et, Joe," advised Harding; "they'll smash it ef ye don't."

"Hedn't ye two better hide?" asked Thompson. "Mebbe they've found out ye cum heer an' air lookin' fur ye."

"I don't see how thet c'u'd be," said Harding; "mebbe we hed better hide."

"Go up in ther attic," said Thompson; "ye know ther way."

"All right."

Harding beckoned to Dick and led the way back into the kitchen.

A ladder in one corner led up to the attic and the two climbed the ladder quickly and disappeared.

As soon as the two had left the main room, Mr. Thompson opened the front door.

Half a dozen redcoats entered the house without ceremony as soon as the door was opened.

It was evident from their looks that they had been drinking and were ready for any kind of deviltry.

"Olro! you decided to open up the door, did you, at last?" cried one of the redcoats. "Well, it's lucky for you that you did."

"We'd have kicked the door off its hinges in another minute."

"And then kicked the daylight out of the owner of the door!" cried another of the redcoats.

"Whut do ye want, gen'lm'n?" asked Mr. Thompson in as calm a tone as he could command.

"What do we want?"

"Yaas."

"You!"

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

"Why do ye want me?"

"Why do we want you?"

"Yaas."

"You know very well why we want you."

"Ye air mistaken, I don't."

"Yes, you do, you blamed old rebel. You know very well why we want you. You are a rebel and a traitor to your king."

Thompson started and turned slightly pale.

"Who told ye thet?" he asked.

The redcoats all laughed hoarsely.

"It doesn't matter who told us," was the reply. "We found it out, and we are going to take you prisoner and take you to our camp and make you join the army and fight for the king, or we'll have the pleasure of shooting you full of holes for the traitor that you are."

A cry of terror escaped Mrs. Thompson who had entered the room and heard what was said, while Mr. Thompson turned paler still.

"Sumbuddy has been lyin' about me," he said.

"No, it is the truth, and you know it."

"You are a rebel, and you are our prisoner. Don't offer to resist, or it will be the worse for you."

The redcoats advanced toward Mr. Thompson.

Evidently it was their intention to make him a prisoner.

But there came an interruption.

As they started to cross the room, with the evident intention of seizing Mr. Thompson, Dick and Mr. Harding leaped out of the kitchen and attacked the fellows.

"Give it to the scoundrels!" cried Dick; "knock them senseless!"

"Go fur 'em, Joe!" cried Harding.

And Joe did "go fur 'em."

He had for the moment forgotten that Dick and Mr. Harding were in the house.

Now, however, that they had appeared and attacked the redcoats, he remembered it, and he was more than willing to fight for his liberty.

True, the redcoats outnumbered himself and friends two to one, but that did not matter.

He would do his best to escape capture.

The redcoats were taken altogether by surprise.

They had not suspected that there were others in the house.

The result was that they were for the moment thrown into confusion.

A surprise is almost always effective.

It was so in this instance.

Dick and Mr. Harding had come out with a rush, and they had attacked the fellows with such fury as to make their work effective.

They knocked three redcoats down almost before the fellows realized what was taking place.

And then Mr. Thompson came to their aid, and the other redcoats went down in their turn.

This gave the three such a decided advantage that, notwithstanding the fact that they were outnumbered two to one, they were enabled to keep the upper hand of the redcoats.

They kept their eyes wide open, and whenever one of the fellows attempted to get up, he was promptly knocked down again.

In this way they managed to keep the redcoats under control.

It was a peculiar spectacle to see three getting the better of six, but the surprise and the advantage gained by means of the surprise made this possible for the three.

It did not take the redcoats long to get enough.

After the leader of the gang had been knocked down twice, he yelled to his companions:

"Let's get out of this place, men!"

Then, instead of trying to regain his feet, he rolled over and over toward the doorway, and, reaching it, plunged headfirst out through it.

The others took their cue from their leader and followed suit.

Seeing what the redcoats were doing, Dick, with grim humor, went to work to assist them by the application of the toe of his shoe.

Mr. Harding and Mr. Thompson followed Dick's example also, and it did not take long to clear the cabin of the redcoats.

Dick seemed to know exactly what the redcoats would do as soon as they got straightened up, and, turning to Mrs. Thompson, he said hurriedly:

"Close and bar the door after us, and go up into the attic!"

Then to Mr. Harding and Mr. Thompson he said:

"Come; follow me!"

He leaped through the open doorway, and the two men followed him.

The door came shut behind them with a slam, showing that Mrs. Thompson was doing her part.

Dick and his two companions ran swiftly out to one side, away from the house.

It was lucky they moved so swiftly, for there came the sharp, whiplike cracks of pistols.

The redcoats had seen the three leave the house and had fired at them.

They had not fired quickly enough, however, and missed the three, who had succeeded in getting out of range.

"Let's fire upon them, and then run still farther to one side," said Dick.

The three drew their pistols, and then, at the word from Dick, they fired.

A wild yell of pain, anger, and surprise came as an answer to the volley, and the three hastened still farther to one side.

This was a wise move, for the redcoats fired another volley.

They aimed at the spot from whence had come the shots, so did no damage.

Had the three remained there, however, they might have been struck by some of the bullets.

Again Dick and his two companions fired, and again they ran quickly still farther to one side.

The redcoats uttered yells of anger, and fired another volley in return, doing no damage.

They evidently decided that they had enough, however, for the three heard the redcoats moving away.

"They're going!" said Dick; "they have had enough."

"Fur ther present, yaas," said Harding; "they'll come back purty soon, an' bring er lot uv ther comrades with 'em."

"D'ye think they will?" asked Mr. Thompson, anxiously.

"I am afraid so," replied Dick, soberly. "They are undoubtedly very angry on account of the manner in which we handled them, and they will pant for revenge."

"Then whut air we ter do?" asked Mr. Thompson, fearfully.

"I hardly know," replied Dick.

"They'll pull ther house down over our heads, er they'll burn et ter ther groun'!"

"I fear you are right," agreed Dick, soberly.

"I know whut we kin do!" exclaimed Mr. Thompson, suddenly.

"Whut, Joe?" asked Harding.

"We kin go ter my ole cabin, back in ther timber—ye know whar et is, Sam."

"Yaas, but—they'll burn this house down, Joe."

"They would do it anyway, Sam," said Dick; "and would capture Mr. Thompson."

"Thet's so; I guess et'll be ther bes' thing ter do."

"I think so."

The three hastened back to the house and knocked on the door.

"Et's me, Joe, Mary," said Mr. Thompson.

The door was opened at once, and the three entered the house.

"Git reddy, quick ez ye kin, Mary," said Joe; "we've gotter leeve heer an' go back ter ther ole house. Them

redcoats 'll be back heer in er jiffy, an'll burn this house down!"

"I'll be reddy in er minnet, Joe."

Mrs. Thompson gathered up a few things which she wished to take with her.

Dick and the two men took such things as they could carry handily, also, and then they started.

As they were leaving the house they heard the sounds of excited voices and hurrying footsteps.

"They're coming!" said Dick in a low tone; "they must have met some more of their comrades and have returned quickly to seek revenge."

The four hastened back to the stable, and Dick brought his horse out.

Then they moved away at a good pace, and just then a wild shout of anger announced the fact that the redcoats had discovered that their intended victims had flown.

The fugitives hastened their footsteps somewhat at this.

They feared the redcoats might run out, and scatter and make search, and thus discover which way the fugitives had gone.

The four had a good start, however, and they felt confident that the redcoats could not discover in which direction they had gone.

It would be only by accident if they should succeed in following.

The four soon reached the timber.

Mr. Thompson was in the lead.

He was, of course, perfectly familiar with the route to be taken, and he struck into a path, which he followed unerringly, the others following him closely.

A walk of twenty minutes brought them out in a little glade, at the farther side of which, faintly distinguishable in the darkness, stood a log cabin.

They made their way across to the cabin, and entered.

They had brought candles with them, and one was lighted as soon as they were in the cabin.

The cabin consisted of two large rooms and a loft overhead.

Dick asked what he was to do with his horse.

"Ye'll jes' hev ter tie 'im in ther timber," said Mr. Thompson; "thar's no stable heer."

Dick went outside and led his horse into the edge of the timber and tied him to a tree.

Then he went back and re-entered the cabin.

The cabin had very little in the way of furniture.

Two or three splitlog benches and a rough table was the sum total.

However, as the little party did not expect to be forced

to remain here more than a day or so, it did not matter so much.

It would be possible to put up with almost anything for such a short length of time.

They had been there perhaps half an hour, when suddenly Dick's quick ear caught a sound which caused him to leap to his feet with such suddenness as to give his companions a start.

With a single bound the youth reached the door.

Slamming it shut he seized the bar and placed it across the door.

As he did so a wild yell went up from without.

It was a yell of delight and triumph.

It was given vent to by the redcoats, Dick was sure.

"They have followed us here!" Dick said, in a hard, tense tone; "we are surrounded by redcoats! We are in a trap!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE BURNING OF THE CABIN.

The four looked at one another in dismay.

"Let's get back out of range with the door," said Dick; "they might fire a volley through it."

This suggestion was acted upon at once.

All drew over to one side, and, when out of range of the door, paused and listened.

There came a thunderous rapping on the door.

"Open in the name of the king!" cried a hoarse and authoritative voice.

Dick motioned for his companions to remain silent.

Receiving no reply, the redcoat again thumped on the door, and again cried out:

"Open, in the name of the king!"

Dick decided that as they had been seen before he had shut the door, and the redcoats knew that they were in there, he might as well answer the fellow, so he said:

"Who are you, and what do you want?"

"We are soldiers of the king, and we want you!" was the reply; "open the door at once!"

"And if we don't choose to do so?"

"We'll break it down."

"You can't do it."

"Why not?"

"It's too strong."

"Bah! we can break the door down; or, if we can't, we can burn the cabin, and roast you like rats in a trap!"

"But you wouldn't do that!"

"Wouldn't we?"

There was a scornful, threatening ring to the voice, as much as to say:

"We'll show you!"

"You surely would not," replied Dick; "there is a woman in here."

"The more blame upon you, then, if you refuse to open the door. If you force us to use extreme measures, you will be to blame, not us."

"But why should you interfere with us? Why not let us alone?"

"Why should we interfere with you?—because you are rebels!"

"You don't know that."

"We are well enough satisfied of the fact so that we shall have no hesitancy in going to extremes, unless you open the door and surrender, at once!"

Dick realized that there was no use of arguing the case with the fellow.

The redcoats were determined to capture the inmates of the cabin.

Dick looked inquiringly at his companions.

"What are we to do?" he asked.

The others shook their heads.

"I don't feel like surrendering," said Dick.

The two men said the same.

"Are you going to open the door and surrender?" came in an impatient voice from without.

"No!" replied Dick, firmly.

A curse was heard, and then the voice cried:

"All right; you'll be sorry for it!"

A few moments later there came a heavy thud against the door.

Several of the redcoats had rushed forward and thrown themselves against the door.

It shook and quivered, but gave no signs of giving way.

"They can't break et down thet way," said Mr. Thompson; "et's too stout fur 'em."

"But that won't help us any," said Dick; "as soon as they find that this is the case, they will set fire to the cabin!"

"D'ye reely think they'll do thet?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"But thet would be orful! Shorely they wouldn't burn us up!"

"Well, you see, they know that we can open the door and come out at any time we wish; so they would feel that if we remained in here and were burned up, it would be our own fault."

"I see; waal, whut air we ter do, then?"

"I hardly know."

Again came the sound of the impact of the forms of the redcoats against the door, but as before the door stood firm.

"They'll soon fin' they can't do thet," said Mr. Thompson.

"An' then they'll start ther fire!" said Harding.

"That is what they will do," agreed Dick; "how I wish there was some other way of getting out of here besides the door."

Just then there came the sound of another assault upon the door, but, as before, it showed no signs of weakening.

The redcoats evidently came to the conclusion after this attempt that they could not break the door down, for presently the voice of one of the fellows was heard.

"Will you open the door and surrender?" was asked.

"No!" replied Dick.

"If you don't, we shall set fire to the cabin and burn it down. We give you fair warning!"

"Go ahead! We will not open the door!"

Dick felt confident that the redcoats would do as they had threatened they would do, but he was determined that he and his companions should not leave the cabin until they were forced to do so.

All listened intently.

They could hear the sound of footsteps and of murmuring voices.

They heard rattling and scraping sounds at the side of the cabin, and decided that the redcoats were piling brush and sticks against the logs, preparatory to starting the fire.

Perhaps twenty minutes passed, and then the voice of the redcoat was again heard.

"We have set fire to the cabin!" came the words; "and if you don't come out pretty soon, you will be roasted out!"

The four looked at one another blankly.

Of course, they would not of necessity have to remain in the cabin and be burned to death, but the other alternative was to be made prisoners by the redcoats, and it was not a pleasant alternative by any means.

"If only there was another way of leaving the cabin!" said Dick.

Mrs. Thompson started and gave utterance to a little cry.

"The loose clapboards, Joe!" she exclaimed; "you remember them, don't you? They are right under thet limb thet comes out frum the big tree. Mebbe we could git out thet way."

Mr. Thompson started.

"Thet's right. I hed furgot erbout thet," he said; "thar

air some loose clapboards on ther ruff, jes' unner whar thar is er limb ez grows out frum er big tree jes' back uv ther cabin, an' we might git out thet way."

"We'll try it, at any rate," said Dick, promptly. "Lead the way, Mr. Thompson; the fire is in front, and the redcoats will be around there watching the door and expecting to see us open it and come out and surrender. Perhaps we may be able to escape after all."

Mr. and Mrs. Thompson led the way, Dick and Harding following.

They made their way into the other room, and Mr. Thompson, Dick, and Harding climbed a ladder which reached up to the loft, and then assisted Mrs. Thompson to do the same.

It was very dark in the loft.

They had to practically feel their way.

They had feared to bring the candle along, for the reason that the light might shine out through between the clapboards and betray them to their enemies.

Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, of course, were perfectly familiar with the arrangement of things in the attic, and had no trouble in making their way to the corner where the loose clapboards were; and all Dick and Harding had to do was to follow.

When the corner was reached Mr. Thompson went to work to remove the loose boards.

This was not a difficult task, though he had to be careful not to make a noise that would attract the attention of the redcoats.

One after another he removed the clapboards, and as he pulled them loose he passed them back to Harding, who laid them down carefully.

Presently the smell of smoke came to the noses of the four.

"We'll have to hurry and get out of here before the fire blazes up very high, or we'll be seen!" said Dick.

"I think I've got er big enuff hole so we kin climb through et," said Mr. Thompson, cautiously; "shell I try et?"

"Yes, go ahead," whispered Dick.

Mr. Thompson did so.

It was a bright, starlit night, and the others could see the man's body outlined against the background of sky.

They knew he had succeeded in getting through the hole, and out onto the limb of the tree, even before he whispered back:

"All right!"

"You go next, Mrs. Thompson," said Dick, and the woman obeyed.

She was aided by her husband, and when the two had moved away along the limb, Harding made his way out.

Dick went last.

He found the limb to be a good, large stout one.

There was no danger that it would break beneath the combined weight of the four.

The greatest danger was that the fire would blaze up sufficiently so that the fugitives would be revealed to the view of the redcoats.

The fire was not yet under full headway, however, and they were still safe; they had not yet been observed.

The four made their way along the limb till they reached the main body of the tree.

Then one after another they made their way down to the ground.

Had there been any of the redcoats around at the rear of the cabin, they must have discovered the fugitives; but none were there.

They were all around at the front.

They had doubtless gone around to the back of the cabin at first, had seen that there was no door or window there, and feeling sure the fugitives could not escape in that direction, they did not see the use of keeping watch there.

When the four had reached the ground they lost no time in getting away from the vicinity of the cabin.

They entered the timber and moved silently away.

As they did so they heard the voice of one of the redcoats calling to them to come out of the cabin and surrender.

"They'll be s'prised when ther cabin burns down without our havin' come out," said Harding.

"So they will," agreed Dick.

"They'll think we're burnt to death," said Thompson.

When they reached the point where Dick's horse was tied, Dick untied the animal, and, walking and leading it, followed his companions.

When the four had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile, they paused and held a consultation.

The question was what should they do?

Where should they go?

"I'll tell ye whut let's do, Joe," said Mrs. Thompson, after they had talked some little time.

"Whut, Mary?" asked her husband.

"Le's go ter Sim Martin's. Him an' Susan will be glad ter see us, an'll be glad ter hev us stay thair till ther redcoats hev gone erway."

"Thet's er good idee, Mary. Thet's ther very place fur us ter go."

"How fur is it?" asked Dick.

"Erbout er mile."

"Oh, that isn't far. I'll go there with you and leave my horse, and then I'll go back and keep my eyes on the British."

"Yer'd better stay away frum them, Dick," said Harding. "They're bad 'uns, them redcoats air."

"I'll look out for them."

The four moved onward now.

Mr. and Mrs. Thompson took the lead as they knew the way, and twenty minutes later they reached the cabin of Sim Martin.

Sim and Mary Martin were friends of Mr. and Mrs. Thompson.

They were glad to see their friends, but were sorry to learn that they were in trouble.

"Ther redcoats shurely won't burn down yer house thet's in ther village," said Mrs. Martin; "an' as soon as ther redcoats air gone ye can go back."

"I hope et'll be thet way," said Mrs. Thompson.

Dick, having tied his horse to a tree, announced that he would return and see what the redcoats were doing.

Harding offered to accompany him, but Dick said he thought he would be safer alone.

Knowing that Dick preferred to go alone, Harding did not insist.

Dick set out at once and made his way rapidly back toward the cabin from which they had so recently escaped.

There was a well-defined path, and Dick had no trouble following it.

Above the treetops he could see the reflection thrown up by the burning cabin.

"The whole cabin must be afire by this time," thought Dick. "I suppose the redcoats are wondering why we don't open the door and come out."

And Dick was right.

As he drew near he saw that the entire cabin was a mass of flames.

It threw out such light that the surrounding timber was illumined quite a distance in from the edge, and Dick had to exercise great caution in approaching to keep from being seen.

By keeping behind the trees, Dick reached a point only a few yards distant from the burning cabin.

Dick could see the majority of the redcoats.

There were about twenty of them, and they were gathered in a group perhaps fifteen yards from the cabin.

They were where they could see the front door, but it was evident that they had given up all expectation of seeing their intended victims emerge from the cabin.

Dick could hear what the fellows were saying as they talked in rather excited voices, and he gathered from their

conversation that it was their opinion that the inmates of the cabin had already succumbed to the heat and smoke.

Some of the redcoats said that it was too bad that the people should die such a horrible death, while others said it served them right.

Dick was glad to know that there were a few humane men among the redcoats.

He was still gladder to know that the redcoats were mistaken in thinking himself and companions were in the cabin, however.

A few minutes later the roof of the cabin fell in with a great crash.

That settled it, the redcoats decided.

The inmates of the cabin could not be otherwise than dead.

The burning cabin would be their funeral pyre.

No need of their remaining longer, the redcoats reasoned.

They turned and slowly made their way across the open space, going in the direction of the village.

Dick remained where he was for several minutes after the redcoats had disappeared in the timber at the other side of the open space.

Then he left his hiding-place and made his way in the same direction.

As he left the open space and entered the edge of the timber, Dick was treated to a surprise.

Half a dozen men leaped upon him and bore him struggling to the ground.

CHAPTER V.

A CLEVER ESCAPE.

The men were redcoats.

Dick realized this instantly.

He understood matters perfectly.

The redcoats—or some of them at least—had paused just within the edge of the timber to watch the burning cabin awhile longer, and had undoubtedly seen Dick emerge from the timber at the opposite side of the opening and come walking across toward them.

The redcoats did not recognize Dick as being one of the four who had been in the burning cabin.

They had started out with the intention of capturing somebody, however, and they made up their minds to capture Dick.

The youth was taken wholly by surprise.

Even had he not been he could not have hoped to successfully resist the redcoats.

Knowing this he made no resistance, however.

His mind was acting with lightning-like rapidity, however, and even as he lay there held down by the half-dozen men, he decided upon a course of action.

He would pretend that he was a Tory and that he was coming to the village for the purpose of offering his services to fight for King George.

Luckily for Dick he had left his Continental uniform at the patriot encampment at Germantown and had on an ordinary rough suit of citizen's clothes such as would be worn by a Jersey country youth.

"What ye doin'!" cried Dick; "what'd ye jump on me for. I hain't been doin' anything."

The redcoats rose to their feet and jerked Dick to his feet also.

They led him out into the open space where the reflection from the burning cabin made everything as light as day, and gathered around him.

Feeling sure that the youth could not escape, the redcoats let go of him.

They eyed Dick critically.

"Who are you, young fellow?" asked one of the redcoats; "and where were you going?"

"I'm Tom Billings," replied Dick; "and I was goin' to the village."

"To what village?"

"Elkton."

"Why were you going there?"

"Why was I goin' there?"

"Yes."

"Why, I heerd that the British army was there, an' I was goin' there to jine it."

"Ah! then you are loyal to the king?"

"Yes, I'm er loyal man."

Dick meant that he was loyal to his country, but of course the redcoats thought he meant that he was loyal to King George.

Of course this was what Dick intended they should think.

"And you want to join the British army and fight for the king?"

"Yes, that's what I want ter do."

The redcoat who had done most of the talking eyed Dick searchingly and somewhat sternly.

"Do you know," he said, slowly and deliberately, "I more than half-believe you're a rebel spy."

Dick was a good actor.

He looked the redcoat straight in the eyes, while he simulated a look of stupid amazement.

"Who, me?" he half gasped.

"Yes, you."

"Me a rebel spy!"

"Yes."

Dick looked at the fellow a few moments longer and then suddenly burst out laughing.

"Haw, haw, haw!" he roared; "thet's er good joke, thet is! Me er rebel spy. Me, ther son of Jack Billings, one of the strongest king's men in this part uv the country, er rebel spy. I guess not! I hain't no rebel spy, nur no rebel ennything!"

"You are really a loyal king's man, then?"

"Uv course I am."

"And you want to join the British army and fight for the king?"

"Of course I do."

"All right," said the redcoat; "you shall have your wish. Come along with us."

"Where ye goin'?"

"Straight to the British encampment."

"Air ye fellers British soldiers?" asked Dick.

"Yes," was the reply; "don't you see our uniforms?"

"Yes, I see 'em; but I didn't know them wuz British uniforms."

"Then you never saw a British uniform before?"

"I never did."

"Well, you'll see enough of them from now on. Within a mile of this spot there are eighteen thousand men wearing this uniform."

Dick looked at the fellow in well-simulated amazement.

"Eighteen thousand!" he gasped.

"Yes."

"My, but thet must be a lot of men! I didn't know there wuz thet many people in ther world."

"Well, it is the truth; there are eighteen thousand of them."

"Great guns! then ye won't need me, will ye?" said Dick.

There was such a well-simulated look of dismay on Dick's face that the British soldiers had to laugh.

The youth was playing the part of an unsophisticated country youth so perfectly that the redcoats were thoroughly deceived.

Their suspicions, if they had had any, were dismissed as being absurd.

"Oh, we can use you all right," said the redcoat; "we'll take all the recruits we can get; we are likely to become engaged in battle at almost any time and lose fifty, a hun-

dred, or maybe even a thousand men, and we will need others to take their places."

"Oh, thet's it?"

"Yes."

"An' you'll take me?"

"We will."

"An' make er soldier out uv me?"

"Well, as to that I cannot say," with a smile; "we'll come as near making a soldier out of you as possible."

The redcoat little thought that he was at that very moment talking to one of the best and ablest soldiers in the patriot army.

Dick smiled to himself when he saw the redcoats smile.

He knew what the redcoat was thinking—that it would be impossible to make a good soldier out of such raw material.

He was satisfied to have them think thus, however.

In order to be able to effect his escape he would have to throw them entirely off their guard, and the greener he made them think he was, the more they would be thrown off their guard.

Then by watching his opportunity he believed he would be able to escape.

When the redcoats said that they would make as good a soldier as possible out of him, Dick simulated a look of pleasure.

"I'm glad of that," he said; "an' will I hev one uv them purty uniforms, too?"

"Yes, you'll have a uniform, too, my boy. They're gorgeous, aren't they?"

"I—guess so," said Dick, hesitatingly. "They're purty, ennyhow."

The redcoats laughed, and then the one who had done most of the talking said:

"Come, fellows, let's be going."

The redcoats gave one more look at the burning cabin, and then, with Dick in their midst, entered the timber and made their way toward Elkton.

Dick had talked and acted so innocently and unsophistically that the redcoats' suspicions had been wholly removed.

They believed that Dick was really what he represented himself to be.

They thought he was the son of a rank Tory and that he was eager to join the British army and get to wear a red uniform.

Believing thus, they paid no particular attention to Dick, and made no pretense of trying to guard him.

He walked along in the midst of the crowd and was as free as any of them.

They had no fear that he would attempt to escape.

This was exactly the state of mind that Dick had been working to get them into.

It would give him a good opportunity to try to escape.

Dick knew that the strip of timber through which they were to go was about a quarter of a mile wide.

He must make the attempt to escape before this distance was traversed.

If he waited till they were out of the timber, his chance for escape would not be nearly so good.

Dick kept on talking as they walked along and asked many simple questions as he could think of in order to keep the suspicions of the redcoats allayed.

At the same time slowly and cautiously he worked his way from the midst of the redcoats to near the edge of the party.

In the darkness, and while turning this way and that to avoid trees, it was easy to do this without attracting attention.

Presently Dick occupied a position at the extreme edge of the crowd, and suddenly, while one of the redcoats was busily engaged in answering a question which Dick had asked, the youth leaped to one side and darted away through the timber and darkness.

The redcoats heard Dick's footsteps, but even then did not suspect what had happened.

"What was that?" cried one.

"It sounded like some one running," said another.

"Likely it was some rebel who took to the timber when he learned that we were coming ashore from the ships," suggested a third.

"Halt!" cried the redcoat who had all along acted as leader. "Halt, or we will fire!"

He did not suspect even yet that the person to whom he addressed the command was the supposed country youth.

Dick, of course, did not halt.

He kept right on running.

The redcoats in obedience to a command from their leader drew their pistols and fired into the darkness, but their shots did no damage.

The redcoats did not expect to hit the fugitive, however, and as soon as they had fired, they stuck their pistols back in their belts and moved forward once more.

"Well, Billings, do you think you will like the crack of firearms and the smell of burning powder?" asked one of the redcoats.

There was no reply.

Of course there would be no reply, as Dick was by that time quite a distance away.

The redcoats did not know this, however, and were surprised when "Billings" did not reply.

Even yet they did not suspect.

"Hey, Billings!" the redcoat called out; "didn't you hear what I said?"

Still no reply.

"Where are you? What is the matter with you? Why don't you answer?"

The redcoat fired out those questions one after another like shots from a gun.

Still there was no answer.

A sudden suspicion entered the fellow's mind.

"By Jove!" he suddenly exclaimed; "I'll wager a hundred pounds that fellows was a rebel after all, and that he has been fooling us. He made us think he was a Tory in order that he might get a chance to escape. He succeeded admirably, for it was his footsteps we heard awhile ago."

All realized the fact, now that the supposed Billings was gone.

The thought that the youth had fled was sufficient evidence against him.

They had no doubt but what he was a rebel.

The realization that the youth had fooled them so easily and completely, made them very angry.

Their discomfiture was great.

They threatened what they would do should they succeed in getting hold of him again.

But would they get hold of him again?

Not if Dick could help it.

Meanwhile, what of Dick?

He had hastened on through the timber and soon reached the open country at a point perhaps a quarter of a mile from the village.

Dick felt very well satisfied.

The thought of how easily he had deceived the redcoats and escaped from them after having been wholly within their power, was a pleasing one.

He laughed aloud as he thought of how disconcerted the redcoats would be when they discovered the manner in which they had been tricked.

He hastened onward, and a few minutes later reached the village.

He paused in front of the main tavern of the village.

The front room of the tavern was a barroom and lounging place.

He glanced through the window and saw that there were quite a number of redcoats in the barroom.

Dick made up his mind to enter.

He realized that this would be dangerous, but he did not let it deter him.

He wished to learn all he could regarding the intended movements of the British army.

By listening to the talk of the redcoats he might be able to gain some valuable information.

The soldiers were drinking and would naturally be talkative.

Having made up his mind, Dick did not delay.

He pulled his hat down so as to shade his face and entered the barroom.

Dick was pleased to note that his entrance did not attract much attention.

Besides the redcoats a number of men of the village were present; also there were three or four youths of about Dick's age.

Dick managed to take his place among them and listened with eager interest to all the talk indulged in by the redcoats.

Of course there was considerable talk that did not amount to anything, but occasionally some one of the fellows would let slip a remark regarding the intended movements of the British army, and Dick was careful to make a mental note of all such remarks.

Of course he felt confident that it was General Howe's intention to move upon and try to capture Philadelphia, but there were several routes he could take, and it would facilitate General Washington's work greatly to know in advance which route the British were going to traverse.

As the fumes of the liquor the redcoats were imbibing mounted to their brain, they became more and more hilarious.

One big fellow especially got to feeling so good that he had to indulge in horse play.

He thumped, slapped, and shoved his comrades around, and presently began using the same tactics with the ordinary citizens of Elkton, who were in there playing the part of spectators.

He upset one man on the floor, and, tripping a youth and giving him a shove, sent him sprawling across the prostrate form of the man.

This suddenly struck the redcoat as being a particularly pleasing diversion, and he started in to pile all the men and youths in a heap upon the floor.

Some of the men and youths took the matter as a joke and laughed good-naturedly, but several were pretty badly frightened.

They didn't know but the redcoat might take a notion to shoot them or bayonet them.

The fellow's comrades were greatly amused.

They laughed heartily and applauded their comrade.

Their applause, of course, served to egg the redcoat on.

It was extremely gratifying to him to know that he was having lots of sport, and contributing to the enjoyment of his comrades at the same time.

The redcoat was very successful, and he met with no opposition until he came to Dick.

Then as he sought to seize Dick and throw him onto the pile of squirming men and boys, he received an unexpected setback.

He had supposed, of course, that it would be with Dick as it had been with the others, that all he would have to do would be to seize him and give him a toss, but Dick was not disposed to submit to this.

Dick felt that the fellow ought not to be allowed to have it all his own way, and he made up his mind to turn the tables on the fellow if he possibly could.

Owing to the fact that the redcoat was not anticipating opposition, this made the matter one of no great difficulty.

Especially was this the case with Dick, for he was a premenally strong and athletic young man.

As the redcoat sought to seize Dick, the youth evaded his grasp, and, seizing the redcoat just right at the same time bending his body so as to utilize it in lifting, he raised the astonished soldier off the floor, and, giving him a dexterous whirl, deposited the fellow on top of the pile of men and youths with a thump.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK SURPRISES THE REDCOATS.

The redcoats stared in open-mouthed amazement.

They did not know what to think.

It was one of the most wonderful exhibitions that they had ever seen.

The redcoat who had been handled in such an unceremonious fashion was a large fellow, being exceedingly well-built and strong looking.

He was in truth the bully of his regiment.

There was not a man in the regiment who had ever been able to stand before him.

Yet here was a country youth who had handled their comrade almost as if he was a baby.

True, their comrade was half-drunk and had been taken by surprise, but even so they would not have believed that even under those circumstances the youth could handle their friend as he had done.

Perhaps the most surprised man of all was the fellow who had been handled so unceremoniously by Dick.

He wriggled down off the top of the pile of men and boys and struggled to his feet.

As his glance fell upon Dick, an exclamation of anger escaped him.

Then a look of wonder appeared upon his face.

He stared at Dick in open-mouthed amazement.

He looked at his companions, at the pile of men and boys glanced down at himself, and then again at Dick.

"Surely it can't be possible!" he exclaimed, seemingly more to himself than otherwise. "No such country clown-hopper as that could have handled me in such a manner."

"But he did do that very thing, Chester," said one of the redcoats.

"Not by himself."

"Yes, by himself."

The redcoat flushed and an angry light appeared in his eyes.

"It was an accident!" he declared. "He couldn't do that again in a thousand years."

"I don't know about that, Chester. He did it that time with remarkable ease."

There was an undertone of satisfaction in the redcoat's voice; the fact was that he had at one time had trouble with Chester, and in the encounter which followed had got the worst of it, hence his pleasure at seeing his old-time enemy receive a setback.

Doubtless "Chester" understood this, and it did not add to his equanimity.

His face flushed with anger.

Dick had caused him to appear ridiculous in the eyes of his comrades; he would have revenge.

He strode toward the youth.

After throwing the redcoat on top of the pile of men and boys, the youth had stepped back and stood leaning against the wall.

He stood in a careless attitude, his arms folded, his hat still pulled down over his eyes; dressed in the rough suit of clothes, he looked the awkward country youth to the life.

When the redcoat advanced toward him, however, he straightened up, and, extending one arm, motioned the fellow back.

"Stop!" he cried. "I was not bothering you awhile ago when you attacked me and got the worst of it. You were to blame for what happened and should take your medicine unmurmuringly."

"Oh, you can't expect me to do that," the redcoat cried. "I must get even with you for what you did, and I am go-

ing to do it, too! I am going to prove to the entire satisfaction of my friends here that what took place a few minutes ago was an accident."

"If you'll take my advice," said Dick, in a quiet but firm tone of voice, "you will let the matter rest. You'll be sorry if you do not."

The redcoat laughed in a sneering manner.

"Thank you," he said, sarcastically; "the best thing about your advice is that it is free. I'll just show you and my friends here how easily I can handle you."

He leaped forward as he ceased speaking and attempted to seize Dick.

The youth was on his guard, however.

He was not taken unawares.

As the redcoat leaped forward Dick leaped to one side.

The redcoat failed to get hold of his intended victim.

Dick had sized the redcoat up carefully.

He saw that the man was large, strong, and athletic-looking.

He realized that if the redcoat succeeded in getting a good hold upon him he would prove to be a very dangerous opponent.

So Dick made up his mind not to let the fellow get hold of him.

He made up his mind also to lose no time in dealing with the fellow.

By being very quick he would have an advantage over his larger and clumsier opponent.

So, darting under the man's arm, Dick slipped around behind him quick as a flash.

Catching the redcoat by the collar with his left hand, and throwing his right arm around the man's waist, Dick again lifted the fellow into the air, using his hip as a fulcrum, and threw him to the floor with a crash.

The men and boys had had time to regain their feet, so the redcoat had nothing soft to alight upon this time.

The result was that he was jarred terribly.

For the time being he was stunned.

He lay there flat on his back staring up at the ceiling in a dazed manner.

Evidently his wits were so scattered by the fall that for the time being he did not know what had happened.

Again exclamations of amazement and wonder escaped the redcoats.

They did not know what to think of the affair.

Like the fallen redcoat, they had thought the first performance of the youth an accident.

But now he had done the same thing a second time.

And that, too, when their comrade was on his guard and fully alive to what he might expect.

It was certainly wonderful.

And the young stranger was certainly a wonderful youth.

Who could he be?

What sort of a fellow was he, anyway?

Were there many like him in this part of the country? they asked themselves.

Presently the redcoat who had met with such rough usage at Dick's hands stirred and rose slowly to a sitting posture.

He scratched his head and looked about him in a puzzled manner.

It was evident that he did not understand matters.

A few moments he sat there and then he slowly and laboriously rose to his feet.

He swayed slightly and seemed somewhat dizzy.

This was not to be wondered at.

The jar he had had was a very severe one.

It was a wonder that he was able to stand up at all.

The fact that he was able to do so spoke eloquently of his toughness.

Presently he seemed to come to a realization of where he was.

His eyes fell on Dick and he gave a start.

It seemed as if everything came back to him in an instant.

He gave utterance to a hoarse roar of anger.

He rushed at Dick with all the ferocity of a maddened tiger.

The jar of the fall had sobered him, and this made him all the more fierce and dangerous.

Dick saw that there was warm work ahead.

He was far from being frightened, however.

He had great confidence in himself and believed that he would be able to hold his own against the infatuated redcoat.

Without a doubt he was the only one in the room who did think so.

The redcoat's comrades believed that now that he was thoroughly aroused their comrade would make short work of the supposed country boy.

But they were destined to be surprised once more.

Youth though he was, it is doubtful if there could have been found anywhere a man or youth better versed in the use of nature's weapons than was Dick.

He was phenomenally strong, was as active as a cat, and was a natural athlete.

In addition he was utterly fearless, as cool as ice, and these qualities all taken together, made him a dangerous opponent for any man.

He was a youth who used his brains in affairs of this kind.

If he had been engaged in a combat with a youth like himself, and of his own size and weight, he would have stood up and met him squarely, without giving an inch; but this redcoat was a full grown man, muscular and strong and heavy.

It would not do to make a firm stand against him, right at first.

Dick realized this, and he made use of his feet.

He leaped here and there.

He evaded the redcoat by ducking and by darting under the fellow's arms.

He was here, there, and everywhere, and was livelier, far, than the far-famed Dutchman's flea.

The redcoat struck at the youth swiftly and fiercely.

He was very angry, and was bent on annihilating the youth in short order.

But out of fifty blows delivered, he did not land a single one in such a manner as to do any damage.

He struck Dick a number of times on the arm and shoulders, but the blows were glancing ones and did no damage.

Dick's theory in an affair of this kind was to first exhaust his adversary in order that said adversary might not win; then, having done this, to go in in his turn and win.

And this he did.

He led the redcoat such a merry dance, and caused him to expend so much strength and energy striking the air, that the fellow was presently almost exhausted.

Then Dick took his turn.

The youth had no liking for anything of this kind.

He did not take pleasure in pounding any one.

But when, as in this case, the affair was forced upon him, he did not hesitate or hold back, but handled his opponent about as roughly as he could.

He knew the only way he could put an end to this affair would be by giving the redcoat a terrible thrashing.

He set to work to do this.

He began raining the blows upon the redcoat.

He struck the fellow in the face, throat, chest, on the jaw, and finally wound up by giving the redcoat a terrible blow at the pit of the stomach.

This blow was almost equal to the kick of a mule.

It doubled the redcoat up like a jack-knife.

Down he went with a crash.

He writhed, kicked, and twisted about on the floor, and groaned in a dismal manner.

The terrible stroke had knocked all the breath out of his

body, and it began to look as if he was going to have hard work to get it back again.

Cries and exclamations of wonder went up from the redcoat's comrades.

"Wonderful!"

"Whoever saw the likes of that?"

"It beats anything I ever saw."

"Jove! Chester looks sick, doesn't he?"

"That blow was enough to make anybody sick."

"It certainly was."

"I wouldn't let that fellow hit me like that for a thousand pounds."

If looks and actions went for anything, the redcoat certainly was sick.

He groaned in a terrible manner.

He rolled from side to side, gasped, snorted, and finally caught his breath with such effort and suddenness that he was jerked to a sitting posture.

He sat there rocking backward and forward, his hands on his stomach, and presently he stopped groaning long enough to ask for some liquor.

One of the fellow's comrades took him some liquor which he drank at a gulp.

A little later he said that he felt better, but he was so weak that he had to be helped to his feet.

That he felt sick was evident for he was as pale as a ghost.

He said that he was too sick to return to camp that night, so a couple of his comrades helped him upstairs to one of the bedrooms and he lay down.

Just as they were leaving the barroom to go upstairs, the front door opened, and a score of redcoats entered.

At a glance Dick recognized them.

They constituted the part that had captured him an hour before, and from which he had escaped in such a clever manner.

CHAPTER VII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

Dick knew that he was in dangerous quarters.

He was sure the redcoats would recognize him.

They did not notice it at once.

They were thirsty.

They had no eyes for anything save the bar.

They hastened to line up in front of the bar and call for drinks.

Dick deemed this his opportunity.

He moved quietly toward the door.

But he did not reach it.

One of the redcoats while waiting for the liquor to be served glanced around.

He saw Dick and recognized him.

With a bound he was at the door with his back against it.

He had been much nearer the door than Dick, and although the youth made a leap for the door at the same time, the redcoat easily got there ahead of him.

"Aha! you here?" the redcoat cried. "We have you now!"

The fellow's companion now looked around, and as their eyes fell upon Dick, they uttered exclamations of astonishment.

But Dick did not intend to let them capture him.

He had escaped from them once that night and he would do so again.

Whirling, he bounded across the room toward the door leading into a back hallway.

Reaching the door Dick jerked it open and bounded through.

As he did so the sharp crack of a pistol was heard.

Dick felt a quick, burning sensation at the top of his head.

His hat flew off his head.

"That was a close call," thought Dick.

And indeed it had been.

The bullet had grazed the top of Dick's head, cutting into the scalp slightly, and carrying the youth's hat away.

Dick did not know where the hallway led to.

It might lead him into a cul de sac from which he could not escape quickly, and the result would be that he would be either captured or shot.

The chances were that he would be killed by bullets from the redcoats' pistols, as the hallway extended straight back, and the fellows could fire through the open doorway after him.

At the left was a stairway leading upstairs.

Dick decided to risk this.

By going up the stairs he would be out of range temporarily at least.

Dick bounded up the stairs three steps at a time.

As he did so the sound of rushing feet came up from the barroom.

The redcoats were coming in pursuit.

Dick knew they would make strenuous efforts to capture him.

They had no doubt felt greatly chagrined over letting him escape from them in the first place.

Now, that they had another chance to capture him, they would certainly make the most of it.

Dick realized this.

He was as determined to escape as they were to capture him, however, and he exerted himself to the utmost.

He was quickly at the top of the stairs.

A hallway extended back toward the rear of the building.

Dick made his way along this hallway as rapidly as possible.

The hallway was dark.

Dick had to practically feel his way.

As a result his progress was rather slow.

He heard the feet of the redcoats on the stairs.

"I must get in somewhere out of this hallway," thought Dick. "It would be just like those fellows to fire a volley as soon as they reach the head of the stairs."

In feeling along the wall Dick's hand presently came in contact with a doorknob.

Turning the knob he pushed against the door.

The door opened.

"Any port in a storm" is an old sailor's saying.

Dick went on that theory now.

It was any haven in a case of this kind.

He could not do any better.

He leaped through the opening and closed the door behind him, and shoved the bolt into its socket.

Then Dick looked about him.

A candle was burning in the room so he could see his surroundings.

He was in an ordinary tavern bedroom.

At one side was a bed.

Lying on the bed was a man.

The man was a British soldier.

At a glance Dick recognized him.

It was the fellow with whom Dick had had his encounter down in the barroom.

The redcoat opened his eyes and stared at Dick in blank amazement.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he asked weakly.

Then he suddenly recognized Dick.

"I know you now," he said. "You are the young scoundrel who hit me that lick in the stomach. What are you doing here? Not satisfied with half-killing me, have you come here to finish the job?"

"No," said Dick; "I have not come with the intention of bothering you at all: I have other business to attend

to; just keep quiet and say nothing, and you will be all right."

Just then hurrying footsteps were heard in the hall without.

The redcoat thought he understood matters.

"Ah!" he breathed, with a sigh of satisfaction. "My comrades are after you for the way you treated me. Good!"

Then lifting up his voice he cried out in as loud a tone as he could command:

"Here he is, boys! He is in this room!"

Dick whirled upon the redcoat threateningly.

"Keep still!" he said in a low, fierce tone. "Don't utter another word if you do, I'll give you another poke in the stomach with my fist!"

"Ugh!" groaned the redcoat, placing his hand on his stomach and making a wry face.

The very thought of receiving another blow in the stomach made him sick.

"I won't open my mouth again," he said.

"See that you don't!"

That the redcoats in the hall had heard the fellow's words was evident, however, for they were talking excitedly, and presently there came a thumping on the door.

Dick knew that they would soon gain access to the room.

The single bolt would not be strong enough to keep them from breaking the door open.

He would have to escape from this room.

He glanced about him.

There was a window in the room.

Dick hastened to it.

Dick raised the lower sash, and, sticking his head through the opening, looked out.

It was quite dark outside, and he could see nothing with any distinctness.

It would not do to remain in the room, however.

He would have to get out, even though he did have to take chances in doing so.

There was only one way to get out.

That was to jump out.

Dick decided to do this.

He propped the sash up with a stick.

The redcoat was watching Dick.

He understood what Dick's intentions were.

"You'll break your neck if you jump out there," the redcoat said.

"Don't let it worry you," said Dick dryly.

"Oh, it ain't worrying me any," was the reply. "I spoke inadvertently. It will give me great pleasure if you do jump out and break your neck."

"I thought as much. Well, I'm going to jump out, but I shall not break my neck if I can help it."

The redcoats were making lots of noise at the door.

Dick feared that they might break the door down at any moment.

So he lost no time in putting his plan into operation.

He stuck first one leg through the window, then the other.

He had just reached a sitting posture on the window-ledge, when there was a terrible crash at the door.

Dick knew what had happened.

The redcoats had broken the door down.

A cry of pleasure escaped the redcoat lying on the bed.

"They'll get you now!" he exclaimed, addressing Dick.

But Dick did not intend to have it so.

Quick as a flash he slid out of the window, whirling over as he did so, and grasping the ledge with his hands.

As he went down he caught sight of the redcoats pouring into the room.

They had seen him and were bounding across the room.

Dick knew that he had not an instant to spare.

He dropped on down until his body hung extended at full length, his hands grasping the window-ledge.

Only an instant did he hang there, however.

It would not do to let the redcoats get hold of his wrists.

Should they succeed in doing this, they would have him at their mercy.

They would be able to pull him back into the room in spite of himself.

Realizing this, Dick waited but an instant after reaching this position, and then, letting go his hold on the ledge, he dropped like a shot.

In doing this he was taking chances.

He did not know what he might be falling into or upon.

Luck was with him, however.

He struck the ground, alighting squarely upon his feet, and was not injured beyond being jarred by the impact.

He even succeeded in keeping his balance.

Knowing that the redcoats would likely fire a volley down, Dick hastened to get away from the spot.

He ran toward the rear of the tavern.

He had not gone ten paces before he heard the crack of pistols.

As he had anticipated, the redcoats were firing down out of the open window.

"That is rather a vicious crowd," thought Dick. "They would as lieve kill a fellow as not."

Dick was well satisfied, however.

He did not care how much powder they wasted.

He decided to not linger long in the vicinity.

He knew that the redcoats would hasten back downstairs and come out of doors to search for him.

Having no desire to be found by them, Dick moved away from the tavern.

He walked rapidly up the street and did not pause until he reached the edge of the village.

Here he came to a stop.

"Well," he mused; "what shall I do next?"

He studied the matter over.

He hardly knew what to do.

He certainly would not dare return to the tavern.

It would be as much as his life was worth to do so.

The redcoats were very much wrought up now, and would take great pleasure in shooting him if they were to lay hands on him.

At last Dick came to a decision.

"I guess I will return to the cabin and stay over night with my friends," he said to himself. "I don't suppose I could learn anything more of value to-night, anyway."

Dick set out for the cabin at once, and half an hour later reached there.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "LIBERTY BOYS' " MISTAKE.

Dick and Harding put in the next day keeping watch of the redcoats.

By remaining in the timber they were wholly safe from discovery, and could watch the British at their pleasure.

All day long the work of landing the British troops went

It was no small task to transfer eighteen thousand men from the ships to the shore in small boats.

The task was completed by evening, however.

Dick did not think the British would start on their march toward Philadelphia before morning, however.

They would remain where they were over night and march by daylight.

Harding thought the same.

The two now left their post down near the shore of Chesapeake and moved up closer to the village of Elk-

Squads of British soldiers had been going and coming between the British encampment and Elkton all day long. They were a thirsty set of men, and by evening they had practically exhausted the supply of liquor with which the village had been furnished.

Dick thought it possible that Bob might reach the village at any time.

In order to keep a lookout for him, they moved on around to the northern edge of the village.

Here they took up their position and waited.

Bob would come from the north and they would be able to head him off.

That is providing he got there before dark.

Dick and Mr. Harding had been at their post for more than an hour.

The sun had set, and it was rapidly growing dark.

They had about given up hope of seeing Bob, when the trampling of horses' feet came to their hearing.

"Sumbuddy comin'," said Harding, in a low tone.

"Yes," said Dick; "it can't be Bob, though, because there is more than one."

"Thar must be a dozen of 'em, to judge by ther noise."

A sudden thought came to Dick.

"Maybe some of the boys are coming with Bob," he said.

Fearing that they might be mistaken and that it might be a band of Tories, coming to join the British army, the two stepped behind trees.

But it turned out as Dick had thought it might.

The horsemen were Bob and eight or ten of the "Liberty Boys."

Dick and Mr. Harding intercepted them before they could ride out into the open.

Bob and his companions were delighted when they saw Dick.

Bob had feared that his friend might have gotten into serious trouble while trying to spy on the British, and to see him now safe and sound was quite a relief.

"You took the news to General Washington, Bob?" remarked Dick, after an exchange of greetings.

"Yes, Dick."

"What did he say? Was he surprised?"

"Well, I should say he was. He was almost paralyzed with amazement. I could hardly make him believe it at first."

"I don't doubt it. The action of the British in coming away around and up Chesapeake Bay is certainly remarkable not to say unaccountable."

"General Washington thought so. He said General Howe must be crazy."

"Well, it does certainly look that way. It was an act such as one would hardly expect from a sane man."

"That's right."

"What did the commander-in-chief decide to do?"

"He decided to advance southward so as to meet the British."

"What point does he intend to head for, do you know?"

"I think he decided to march south to Wilmington."

"That will be a good place to take up a position. The British will have to pass through Wilmington or near it in order to reach Philadelphia."

"So they will."

"Did the commander-in-chief send any special orders for me, Bob?"

"Yes; he said for us to keep as close to the British as possible and keep watch of them."

"That is what I thought he would want us to do, Bob."

"And he said for us to keep him posted regarding the movements of the British by sending messengers to him each day. That's the reason I brought some of the boys along."

"That was a good idea, Bob. Well, we will obey orders and keep a close watch on the British."

Dick felt sure that the British would not move before morning.

Believing thus, he felt that it would be safe for himself and companions to go to Sim Martin's cabin and spend the night.

He sent Harding into the village to purchase some provisions.

Harding was gone perhaps half an hour, then he returned with a sack thrown over his shoulder.

In the sack were enough provisions to furnish food for a dozen hungry men for two days at least.

The little party at once set out for Sim Martin's cabin.

The sack of provisions had been thrown across the back of one of the horses, thus relieving Mr. Harding of the necessity of carrying it.

The cabin was reached in due time.

The "Liberty Boys" were made heartily welcome.

Mrs. Martin and Mrs. Thompson went to work and prepared a good supper.

All were hungry, and they did full justice to the meal.

Dick, Bob, and their companions remained there all night, but were up very early next morning.

They had eaten breakfast and were ready to take their departure before sunrise.

When they were ready they bade their friends good-by, and, mounting their horses, the "Liberty Boys" rode away.

They rode until they came to the edge of the timber, which bordered Elkton on the north.

It was daylight now.

Early as it was the British were in motion.

Company after company, and regiment after regiment, were advancing across the open.

Some of the companies had already reached the village.

It would not do for the "Liberty Boys" to remain where they were.

They had seen all they wished to see, however, and were ready to retire.

Turning their horses they rode slowly away toward the north.

There was no need of haste.

The bulk of the British army was made up of infantry and could proceed but slowly marching on foot.

It would be easy to keep ahead of them.

The "Liberty Boys" rode northward perhaps a mile and then stopped.

They remained here until the head of the British column was within a quarter of a mile of them, and then they mounted and rode on northward another mile.

They kept up these tactics all day long, pausing at about noontime at a farmhouse to get something to eat.

A little while before dark, the British army came to a halt.

It had been decided to camp for the night.

The "Liberty Boys" went into camp, also.

Their camp was about half a mile from that of the enemy.

An hour or so after dark Dick and Bob left camp and made their way toward the British encampment.

They were soon in the vicinity of the redcoats' camp.

They reconnoitred sufficiently to satisfy themselves that the British intended remaining there all night, and then the youths returned to their own camp.

The "Liberty Boys" were up bright and early next morning.

After having eaten the remnants of a lunch which they had secured at a farmhouse the evening before, the youths were ready for the day's work.

The tactics of the day before were repeated on this day and when evening came it found the British perhaps five miles from Elkton.

It was indeed slow work marching through the timber.

At this rate it would take the British army three weeks to march to Philadelphia.

When they reached more open country, however, they would be able to travel faster.

On the next morning Dick despatched a messenger with a letter to General Washington.

In the letter Dick explained the movements of the enemy in detail.

On receipt of the letter the commander-in-chief would understand the situation perfectly.

The "Liberty Boys" kept this up three days more.

The British army had traversed a distance of about twelve miles.

That evening the "Liberty Boys" had eaten supper at the home of a man whom they sized up as being a Tory.

He had seemed unwilling to let them have food, but when they had insisted and had said that they would pay well for it, he finally consented to let his wife prepare a meal for the youths.

He had asked a number of questions regarding the business of the youths in that part of the country, but Dick, of course, had not given him any satisfaction.

He was baffled in this respect, but when the youths came to pay for the food which they had eaten, the man evened up matters by charging three times what the food was worth.

"Say, Dick, that fellow was a regular robber," said Bob, after they had mounted and were riding away.

"So he was, Bob; he certainly charged more than the food was worth."

"I should say he did. Three times as much. I believe he is a rank Tory, Dick."

"I rather think so myself. I believe that he suspected that we were patriots and charged us accordingly. Then, too, he was altogether too inquisitive to suit me."

"He did ask a good many questions, didn't he?"

"He certainly did!"

It was now nearly sundown.

The British army would soon go into camp for the night, and the "Liberty Boys" began thinking of doing the same.

Suddenly they emerged from the timber out upon an open tract of country of considerable extent, and right in front of them, and not half a mile distant was a pretty little village.

"Hello!" exclaimed Bob; "here will be a nice place to spend the night. I didn't know there was a village in this part of the country, did you, Dick?"

"No; its presence here is somewhat of a surprise to me." The youths rode forward, and were soon in the village.

It was a small place, but there was a tavern, and the landlord said he would try and find room for them.

The youths' horses were taken in charge by the hostler, who had some trouble in making room for them in the stable, as it was not a large one.

He finally managed it, however.

The youths entered the tavern and sat down to rest and talk for an hour or so before going to bed.

They were promising themselves a good night's rest in comfortable beds, but they were destined to be disappointed.

They had forgotten the Tory, at whose cabin they had eaten supper.

They had suspected that the man was a Tory, but dismissed all thoughts of him from their mind after the conversation Dick and Bob had had regarding him; and that was where they made their mistake.

They should have kept him in mind.

CHAPTER IX.

A TORY'S WORK.

When the party of "Liberty Boys" rode away from the cabin of the man whom they had suspected of being a Tory, he looked after them until they had disappeared from view.

Then he turned to his wife, who seemed to be a quiet, patient sort of a woman.

"Molly," he said, "I'll bet a coonskin them fellers air rebels!"

"D'ye think so, Sam?" the woman asked.

"Yaas, I do! An' d'ye know, I b'leeve they air spies!" "Spies!"

"Yaas! Ye know ther British army is comin' north frum Elkton, don't ye?"

"Yes, thet's whut we heerd, Sam."

"Waal, I'll bet ennythin' thet them thar fellers air rebel spies an' thet they air keepin' watch uv ther British army, and sendin' messerges ter Washington right erlong!"

"Mebbe ye air right, Sam."

"I'm shore I am. Didn't ye notuss thet they didn't wanten answer enny questions I axed 'em?"

"Yes, I noticed thet they wuz purty clost-mouthed, Sam."

"Uv course they wuz—an' thet wuz ther reezon uv et, too! They air rebel spies, an' they didn't wanten let on ter me, fur ther reezon thet they wuz afeerd I mought be er Tory."

"I 'spect ye're right, Sam; but whut ye goin' ter do erbout et?"

"Whut am I goin' ter do?"

"Yes."

"Waal, I'll tell ye whut I'm ergoin ter do: I'm ergoin' ter foller them fellers an' see whar they stop, an' then I'm ergoin' ter go south till I fin' ther British army, an' then I'm ergoin' ter tell 'em whut I know, an' they'll come up an' capter ther rebels!"

The woman was silent for a few moments, and then she said:

"Mebbe they ain't rebels, Sam."

The man frowned.

"I know they air!" he declared, almost savagely.

The woman made no reply, and the man at once set out through the timber, following the course taken by the party of "Liberty Boys."

"Et's gittin' late," the Tory muttered; "an' et wouldn't s'prise me ef them fellers stopped all night at ther village."

He reached the edge of the timber just as the youths were dismounting in front of the tavern in the village, and an exclamation of satisfaction escaped him.

"I thort so!" he muttered; "they're goin' ter stay all night at ther tavern. Good! I'll know whar ter look fur 'em w'en I wants ter fin' 'em!"

The man watched until he saw that the horses had been taken to the stable.

"Thet settles it," he muttered. "Now, I know they intend ter stay all night."

Having satisfied himself on this point, the Tory turned and made his way back through the timber.

It did not take him long to reach his cabin.

"They stopped at ther tavern in ther village, Molly," he said to his wife; "I was sure they would."

"Whut ye goin' ter do now, Sam?" the woman asked.

"I'm goin' ter ther British camp as fast as I kin travel."

"An' then whut ye goin' ter do?"

"I'm goin' ter tell ther British about them rebels, an' then I'll guide er party ter where ther rebels are."

After a few more words the Tory struck out.

He went in a southerly direction.

He was confident that he would soon reach the British encampment.

In this he was right.

He had gone scarcely more than half a mile when he was challenged.

"Halt! who comes there?"

"Er friend," replied the Tory.

"A friend, eh?"

"Yaas."

"Well, advance, friend, and give the countersign."

The Tory advanced slowly.

It was evident that he was somewhat frightened.

Doubtless he feared he might be shot before he had time to explain who he was and what his business was.

The redcoat thought from the man's voice that he was some countryman who desired to join the army, so allowed him to advance.

When the Tory had reached the sentinel, the latter asked him who he was and what he wanted.

"I'm er loyal king's man," the Tory replied; "an' I wants ter see General Howe."

"Why do you wish to see him?"

"I want ter tell him somethin' that will please him. I know whar thar's er dozen rebel spies."

"You do?"

"Yaas."

"Are you sure?"

"Yaas, I'm sure uv et."

The sentinel was interested.

If the Tory was right this was an important matter.

He felt that it was a matter that should be investigated, at any rate.

He called the officer of the guard and told him what the Tory had said.

The officer of the guard told the man to follow him, and he led the way into the heart of the British camp.

He came to a stop in front of a large tent.

He spoke a few words to an orderly in a low tone, and the orderly entered the tent.

A few moments later the orderly appeared at the entrance to the tent, and beckoned to the officer of the guard and to the Tory.

The two entered the tent and stood before Generals Howe and Cornwallis.

The officer of the guard began to explain why he had brought the man there, but General Howe waved him to silence.

"Tell us your story, my man!" he said in an authoritative tone, addressing the Tory.

The Tory was somewhat awed by being in the presence of such great men, but he went ahead and succeeded in telling the story in such a manner as to make himself understood.

A growing look of excitement appeared on General Howe's face as he listened, and when the man had finished, the general turned to his companion.

"General Cornwallis," he said in an excited tone, "I will wager a hundred pounds that the leader of that gang of rebels is no other than Dick Slater, the rascally young spy who has given us so much trouble."

"I should not be surprised to learn that this is the case, your excellency," said General Cornwallis.

"I am sure of it! That gang must be captured, General Cornwallis! I would give five hundred pounds for the capture of Dick Slater alone!"

"It is undeniable that he has caused us lots of trouble."

"Indeed he has, but if we can be successful in capturing him to-night, I will see to it that he does not cause us any more trouble for awhile."

"Well, I do not see why he should not be captured."

"Nor I. And say, General Cornwallis, the more I think of this, the more I realize what a lucky thing it was that

is man came to us with this information. It certainly will be a good thing for us if it proves to be correct, and if his gang turns out to be Dick Slater and some of his 'Liberty Boys.' "

"So it will. Well, somehow I have a feeling that this man's information is reliable."

"Ye may be sure et is," said the Tory. "When yer ready ter send ther soldiers, I'll go erlong an' show 'em er way ter whar ther rebels air."

"Very well, sir, your kindness is appreciated, I assure you," said General Howe.

Then, turning to the orderly who stood at the entrance, he said:

"Go out and tell the first captain you see to report to me here in the tent."

The orderly saluted and withdrew.

A few minutes later he returned with an officer wearing a captain's uniform.

The captain saluted his superiors, and General Howe spoke briskly:

"Captain Miller, this man here says he knows where there are a dozen rebel spies. I wish you to take as many as you think necessary and go at once and effect the capture of those rebels. This man will guide you to them."

"Very well, your excellency, I will do so," said the captain, and, saluting, he withdrew from the tent.

"Go with him," ordered General Howe, addressing the orderly. "Guide him to where the rebels are, and when he has captured them return here, and I will give you a liberal reward."

"Thank ye, sir," said the Tory, and, bowing awkwardly, hastened out of the tent.

Captain Miller had already selected fifty of his men, and as soon as the Tory had joined him, he said:

"Lead the way; we will follow."

The Tory struck out at a rapid walk, heading in a westerly direction.

The captain kept by the Tory's side, his men following in a single file behind.

"How far is it to where the rebels are?" asked the captain.

"Not very fur; only a little over er mile, I should say." "Oh, that isn't far."

"No; we kin walk et in fifteen er twenty minutes."

After a walk of perhaps ten minutes they reached the Tory's cabin.

They did not stop.

"Thet's whar I live," the Tory explained. "Ther rebels are. I wuz tellin' Gineral Howe erbout stopped heer an' er pper."

"Oh, that was it?"

"Yaas. I knowed by ther actions thet they wuz up ter deviltry, an' et didn't take me long ter make up my mind thet they wuz rebels, an' thet they hed been spyin' on your army."

"How many are there of them?"

"Thar's ten uv 'em."

"Well, it won't be much trouble for us to capture ten."

"Et hedn't orter be."

A few minutes later they reached the edge of the open, and saw the little village lying in front of them.

It was not yet dark.

The sun had just set, however, and twilight was just setting in.

The soldiers paused just within the edge of the timber, and the Tory pointed toward the village.

"Do ye see thet biggest building yender?" he asked.

"I see it," replied Captain Miller.

"Waal, thet's ther tavern; an' them rebels air in thar."

"Good enough!" exclaimed the captain. "If we hurry, we can easily capture those fellows and get back to camp before dark. Forward, men, on the double quick. We will surround the tavern, and it will be impossible for them to escape us!"

CHAPTER X.

THE FIGHT AT THE TAVERN.

The "Liberty Boys" sat in the big front room of the tavern, and talked for nearly an hour.

Twilight was now coming on.

Suddenly Dick rose and walked toward the door.

"I'll take a walk out to the stable, boys," he said, "and see if the horses have been taken care of all right."

Reaching the door he pulled it open.

As he did so he was surprised to see the man at whose house they had eaten supper.

The Tory was not ten feet distant.

In his hands was a musket.

As the door came open and he saw Dick, the fellow uttered an exclamation and made a motion as if to fire at the youth.

It happened that the youths' muskets were leaning against the wall beside the door.

Seizing one, Dick leveled it quickly and fired.

The Tory uttered a cry of pain and fell to the ground.

Then from around the corner of the building rushed a score of redcoats!

Dick's mind acted with the quickness of a flash of lightning.

He understood the situation instantly.

The fallen man was a Tory, and had guided a band of redcoats to the place.

As the redcoats appeared in sight, Dick slammed the door shut and barred it.

There is a band of redcoats out there, fellows," said Dick. "I fear we are in a trap."

"It looks that way," agreed Bob; "what shall we do?"

"Well," said Dick, grimly; "we'll make a fight of it. We won't surrender till we have to."

"You're right; we won't, old man."

The landlord of the tavern entered the room at this moment.

Dick turned to him.

"Landlord," he said, "there is a band of redcoats outside, and they have come here with the intention of capturing us. I don't know which way your sympathies lie, but if you will keep all the downstairs doors barred, I will, when this thing is over, pay you well for any damage which may be done."

"Surely you're not going to show fight," the landlord said, in surprise. "There must be fifty of the redcoats out there."

"We certainly will show fight, landlord; we have fought against as great odds as that before to-day. Will you keep the doors barred?"

"As long as I can, sir."

"Good!"

Then Dick turned to his companions.

"Come on, boys," he said; "let's go upstairs; we will be able to get a better chance at the redcoats from there than from down here."

The "Liberty Boys" had already seized their muskets, and they followed Dick out of the room and upstairs.

As they did so, a thunderous rap was heard on the front door.

The redcoats were pounding on the door with the butts of their muskets.

They were soon upstairs, and Dick gave his companions instructions.

There were a number of rooms, and the youths divided up, each going into a different room.

Dick had instructed his comrades to keep watch out of the windows, and whenever they succeeded in sighting a redcoat to fire at him.

The youths obeyed orders to the letter, and soon the

crack, crack of firearms was heard from nearly every room upstairs.

Answering reports came from outside the building.

The redcoats did not intend to let their intended victim do all the firing.

This firing was kept up for perhaps ten minutes.

Then it ceased.

The redcoats kept out of sight, so there was nothing for the "Liberty Boys" to shoot at.

The redcoats now turned their attention to trying to get into the tavern.

They pounded on the doors and did their best to break them down.

The doors were strong, however, and withstood the onslaught successfully.

At last the redcoats turned their attention to the windows.

They clubbed their muskets and assaulted the windows fiercely.

The windows were not as strong as the doors.

The result was that they soon gave way.

The redcoats gave vent to shouts of triumph.

Then, one after another, they climbed through the windows.

They soon found the stairway leading upstairs, and with fierce shouts they rushed up the stairs.

Dick had heard the crashing of the windows, and, realizing that the redcoats would soon be inside the building, he called the "Liberty Boys" out of the rooms and led the way to the head of the stairs.

When the redcoats came rushing up the stairs the "Liberty Boys" were ready to receive them.

The youths fired two volleys from their pistols, and then clubbing their muskets, showered fierce blows upon the heads of their enemies.

As the stairway was narrow, only two or three of the redcoats could come up abreast.

This placed them at a great disadvantage, and made it impossible for the "Liberty Boys" to hold their enemies in check.

Shouts and curses escaped the lips of the redcoats.

They had not looked for such a reception.

Confident in the strength of numbers, they had supposed that all they would have to do would be to appear before the "rebels" when the latter would surrender without word.

They had not expected them to show any resistance at all.

But the "rebels" had shown resistance, and already two or three of the redcoats had been killed and several been wounded.

The redcoats' eyes were now opened. They realized that they had a hard task before them. They soon saw that they could not get up the stairs. To persevere and keep on trying to do so, could only result in all of them getting broken heads. Their commander gave the word and they ceased trying to ascend the stairs. They retreated and withdrew into the large front room of the tavern. Here they held a council of war. They also took account of the damages which had been inflicted by the "rebels," and the result of this was anything but soothing to their feelings. Three of their number had been killed outright, four five more had been seriously wounded, while a number of them were possessors of broken heads which they received while trying to mount the stairs. To do him justice, Captain Miller was a brave and determined officer. The havoc which had been wrought by the "Liberty Boys" only made the captain more determined to effect their capture. He had made the mistake of underestimating the youths. He had thought that all he would have to do would be to surround the tavern and accept the surrender of the "rebels." But they had refused to surrender. They had shown fight. Their resistance so far had been very effective. But the captain, although he had suffered a setback, was confident that he would succeed in capturing the "rebels." While the redcoats were holding their council, Dick and his companions were not idle. As soon as the redcoats gave up trying to come up the stairs, Dick led the way back along the hall. At the farther end of the hall Dick opened a door into a room in which none of the youths had as yet been in. When he entered the room, Dick uttered an exclamation of surprise. "Another stairway, boys," he said. "It probably leads down into the kitchen. We'll slip down it while the redcoats are pow-wowing in the front room." Dick led the way, and all went down the stairs. Dick opened the door at the bottom of the stairway. As he had expected, it opened into the kitchen. The landlord was there, looking very much frightened. "Landlord," said Dick, "is there a cellar under this building?" "Yes," was the reply.

"Is there an outside cellar?" "Yes." "Good! How do you get down into the cellar?" The landlord took hold of a ring in the floor and pulled up a large trapdoor, disclosing a series of steps leading down into the cellar. "Thank you," said Dick. Then drawing a couple of gold pieces from his pocket he handed them to the landlord. "That is to pay you for the damages that have been inflicted," he said. "Thank you," said the landlord. "The redcoats did most of the damage, but I don't suppose I shall get anything from them." "I doubt it very much," replied Dick. Then Dick led the way down the steps into the cellar, the other "Liberty Boys" following. "Close the door," called up Dick, and the landlord did so. Dick led the way to the door leading to the outside cellar-way. The door was bolted, and, slipping the bolts, Dick opened the door. A series of stone steps led upward. Above the youths' heads were two slanting trapdoors, which opened upward and outward. Dick well knew that all the redcoats were not within the building. He was confident that a portion of the British force was outside keeping watch to prevent the escape of any of the "rebels" in case they should succeed in getting out of the tavern. But he was determined to make a dash for liberty, anyway. Dick would have liked to remain in the cellar long enough for all to reload their weapons, but he did not dare do this. The redcoats might discover that their intended victims had escaped from upstairs, and at any moment come down into the cellar to look for them. Dick realized that the quicker they got out of the cellar, the better it would be for them. He decided to make a dash for liberty at once. He told his companions to get ready. He instructed them to make a dash for the barn as soon as they were out of the cellar. Dick and Bob led the way up the steps, and Dick placed his hands against one door, while Bob placed his hands against the other.

Dick saw that his comrades were ready, and then, in a low, intense tone, he said:

"Now!"

As he spoke he and Bob pushed the doors upward.

Retaining their hold on the doors, the two youths leaped up out of the cellarway and held the doors open until their comrades had leaped out.

Then Dick and Bob let the doors drop and raced after their comrades, who were running toward the stable as fast as they could go.

So quickly had this been done, and so unexpected was the move, that the youths were halfway to the stable before the redcoats, who had been left outside to watch, awoke to a realization of what was taking place.

Then they uttered loud yells and opened fire on the youths.

They fired so quickly, however, that their shots were in the main wild.

A couple of the "Liberty Boys" were slightly wounded, but not sufficiently to cause them inconvenience.

They raced onward with undiminished speed.

The redcoats fired another volley just as the youths reached the door of the stable, but as in the former case, no particular damage was done.

The next instant the youths darted through the doorway into the stable.

To their delight they found their horses were bridled and saddled.

The hostler, fortunately for Dick and his comrades, was a bright fellow.

He had sized up the situation as soon as the redcoats appeared on the scene.

He realized that the redcoats were there for the purpose of capturing the ten youths, and, being a strong patriot, he had made up his mind to do all in his power to aid the youths.

The thought struck him that they might wish to leave in a hurry, and he had bridled and saddled the horses.

He was in the stable as Dick and his comrades entered.

"The hosses are all ready for ye!" he said, eagerly; "they're ontied, an' all ye hev ter do is lead 'em out."

"Thank you!" said Dick, and he tossed the noble fellow a gold-piece.

Of course, it would be dangerous work leading the horses out of the stable, as they would be subjected to the fire of the redcoats, but the youths did not hesitate.

If they were to escape, they would have to have their horses.

So they led the animals out as quickly as possible, and leaped into the saddles.

As they did so the redcoats fired a volley.

One or two of the horses were struck, but luckily not hard enough to render them incapable of carrying a rider, and the youths put spurs to the animals and dashed away.

At the same instant the redcoats who had been in the tavern came running out, and, seeing the youths riding away, they uttered loud yells of rage.

They, too, fired a volley, but they were so far away that bullets did no damage.

The "Liberty Boys" gave utterance to shouts of defiance and were soon out of range.

CHAPTER XI.

SCOUTING AND SPYING.

"Well, fellows, that was a narrow escape!"

The "Liberty Boys" had ridden clear across the open country, a distance of five miles, and had encamped just within the edge of the timber.

They had tied their horses to trees, had unsaddled and unbridled them, and were now seated beneath the trees of their army blankets.

It was now dark, but not so dark but what they could see one another.

It was Dick who had spoken.

"It certainly was a narrow escape, Dick!" agreed Bob.

"It's a wonder some of us were not killed!" said Sam Sunderland.

"We were very lucky," agreed Dick.

"I'll wager we couldn't go through with that experience again, and all escape alive," said Mark Morrison.

"Right, Mark," said Dick. "Well, I'm sorry the British discovered that they were watched. It will make our work much more difficult from now on. We will have to be on the watch all the time to keep from being captured."

"So we will."

"Another thing," went on Dick; "if the British had not discovered that we were watching them, we might have been able to give General Washington such information relative to their movements as would have enabled him to catch them at a disadvantage, and strike them a death blow. Now, it will be an impossibility for the commander-in-chief to take them unawares, as they know they are being watched and their movements are being reported, and they will be on their guard."

"True," agreed Bob; "and it is the fault of that fellow at whose house we ate supper. He undoubtedly was

aight to the British encampment and told them of our
ing in this part of the country."

"No doubt, Bob; but we made a mistake in stopping
ere in the first place."

"True, Dick; but it was an excusable mistake; we had
have something to eat, and had to stop somewhere."

"Granted, Bob; but you remember we were suspicious
the fellow after we left his house, and talked of the
anner in which he had acted. Where we made the big-
st mistake was in not keeping watch of him for awhile.
en we would have seen him when he started for the
itish camp, and could have made a prisoner of him."

"Yes, that's true, too."

"I'm very sorry this has happened," went on Dick; "for
I said awhile ago, had we been able to keep our presence
front of the British a secret, we might have made it
ssible for the commander-in-chief to catch the redcoats
a trap, and give them a thorough beating. There is no
e, however, of thinking and talking of 'What might have
n.'"

The youths talked for awhile longer, and then, putting
guards, Dick and the others lay down and were soon
leep.

It was the first time they had put out guards, but from
y on they would have to do so regularly.

The British might try to capture them any night.

They were up bright and early next morning.

They kept watch on the British army that day, as they
done before.

But they had to be more careful.

They had to keep at a greater distance.

By climbing to the tops of tall trees, they were enabled
keep watch of the redcoats and note their progress.

This they did for three days, and then on the next night
y met with another adventure.

The British had evidently been doing a little in the way
spying and scouting themselves, and they had located
youths, where they had gone into camp.

A party consisting of about a hundred men made its
northward and tried to slip up onto the youths while
y slept.

The sentinels were too vigilant, however, and they dis-
covered the approach of the British while yet they were a
dred yards away.

Instead of firing upon the redcoats and announcing to
n the fact that their approach had been discovered, the
inels quietly awoke the sleepers, and the little party
kly and silently slipped away from the spot.

The youths walked and led their horses and made but
little noise.

A few minutes later a wild yell of rage and surprise came
to the youths' ears.

They knew then that the redcoats had reached their
late encampment and found it vacated.

"Oh, yell, you scoundrels!" murmured Bob; "that's all
the good it'll do you!"

The youths hastened forward at increased speed now.

Dick feared the redcoats might pursue them.

Should they do so, and come in the right direction, they
might overtake the youths, as it was a difficult matter get-
ting the horses through the timber.

The redcoats naturally judged that their intended vic-
tims had gone in a northerly direction.

So they followed.

They moved as rapidly as they could, and although they
did not know it, they drew nearer and nearer to the fugi-
tives.

The youths were listening intently for sounds of pur-
suit, and they presently heard the redcoats.

"They are after us!" said Dick, in a low, cautious tone.

"Yes, and they'll catch us, too, if we don't lookout!"
said Bob.

The youths hardly knew what course to pursue.

They could not show fight.

Dick had sent two more of the youths to General Wash-
ington with messages, and there were only eight of the
"Liberty Boys" left.

Dick knew there would not be less than fifty of the red-
coats, and it would be folly for eight to try to fight so
many.

They would have to use strategy and stealth.

Presently they came to a sort of ravine.

It was narrow—not more than twenty yards in width.

It was perhaps twenty feet deep.

It extended to the right and to the left.

"Come!" said Dick; "we will follow this ravine, and per-
haps we may be able to get away from the redcoats. We can
ride the horses, and go at a very fair pace."

"That's a good idea!" said Bob.

The other youths thought likewise, and all mounted their
horses.

Then Dick took the lead, and they rode up the ravine.

The horses were urged to a trot, and this promised to
make it possible for the youths to escape from their pur-
suers.

After they had gone perhaps half a mile Dick called a
halt, and they listened intently.

They could hear no sound to indicate the presence of the
redcoats anywhere in the vicinity.

"I guess we have escaped from them!" said Dick.

"I hope so," said Bob.

The other youths all said the same.

They now rode up out of the ravine and moved away in a northerly direction.

They proceeded about a mile, and then stopped.

They decided to remain here the rest of the night.

They did so.

Next morning Dick despatched another youth to General Washington.

All day long the youths kept watch of the British, watching them from the treetops, and then when the British drew near they would retreat to a safe distance.

"Well, I wonder if the redcoats will try to capture us to-night?" remarked Bob, when they had gone into camp that evening.

"I hardly think so," replied Dick. "They had such poor luck last night that I think it will discourage them."

As Dick finished, Bob uttered an exclamation:

"Great guns, fellows!" he cried; "yonder come the redcoats now."

The youths leaped to their feet and looked in the direction indicated by Bob.

They saw a band of redcoats approaching through the timber.

"Fellows," said Dick in a low tone, "I'm tired of being chased by redcoats; there's only about twenty of them; let's show fight."

The youths were all in for this.

There were only seven of them against three times their number of redcoats, but they had encountered greater odds than this on many occasions and came out with flying colors.

They seized their muskets and got ready to give the redcoats a warm greeting.

Just before the redcoats came within range of the muskets, one of the horses gave utterance to a shrill neigh. The redcoats stopped instantly.

They looked in the direction from which the sound had come.

Without a doubt they realized the fact that enemies lurked behind the clump of bushes.

They scattered instantly and took up positions behind the trees.

"Let's charge, fellows, and give it to them at close range!" Dick cried.

He leaped forth from behind the bushes and ran toward the point where the redcoats had been seen.

The other youths followed, giving vent to ringing cheers as they did so.

This move evidently took the redcoats by surprise.

They stuck their muskets around the trees and fired at the "Liberty Boys," but they fired in such haste that their bullets went wild.

Again the youths gave utterance to loud cheers and came onward faster than ever if anything.

The redcoats became seized with a sort of panic.

Two or three broke and ran.

Dick felt that now was their opportunity.

"Fire!" he cried. "Give it to the scoundrels!"

The youths raised their muskets and fired.

A bullet struck one of the fleeing redcoats, and he gave utterance to a blood-curdling howl.

This, followed by another ringing cheer from the "Liberty Boys" finished the work already begun, and all the redcoats took to their heels.

It was rather a ludicrous sight to see twenty men fleeing from seven youths, but the determined manner in which the youths had charged, and the cheers to which they had given utterance, had proven too much for the redcoat nerves.

The "Liberty Boys" chased the redcoats a short distance and then, after firing two more volleys after them from their pistols, they paused and made their way back to their camp.

After indulging in a hearty laugh over the manner in which they had frightened the redcoats, the youths moved their camp half a mile farther to the northward.

All next day Dick and his companions kept watch of the British army and kept retreating before it, and when they saw it go into camp that evening at Kennett Square, a small village six miles from Brandywine Creek, they felt that their work as spies and scouts was for the time being ended.

The patriot army was just across Brandywine Creek, and only about six miles distant, and, feeling certain that battle was sure to take place between the two armies, the youths decided to rejoin their army at once.

They wished to be on hand when the battle begun.

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